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SUBJECT: OHCHR FIELD OFFICE NEEDS TO WORK HARDER ON TRC
IMPLEMENTATION

REF: SECSTATE 73151

Summary

¶1. The UNIOSIL Human Rights Section manages UNHCHR activities in Sierra Leone. The Section Director told PolAsst that the primary activities of his office were dissemination, sensitization, and implementation of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations. Recently, the mandate was expanded to include activities related to rule of law. Unfortunately, lack of resources, strategic focus and political will has caused TRC implementation to stagnate. UNIOSIL's TRC activities have not been as visible as those of NGO's. Greater collaboration between UNIOSIL and civil society may help overcome the GoSL's lack of political will for implementation. End Summary

UNIOSIL Contributes to TRC Awareness and
Increasing Rule of Law

¶2. On June 27, Pol Intern met with Benedict Sannoh, UNIOSIL Human Rights Section Director, to discuss the activities of the OHCHR field presence in Sierra Leone. The mandate of the Human Rights Section includes dissemination, sensitization, and implementation of the TRC recommendations and improving rule of law. Sannoh's office created a 75 page summary of the full 2,032 page TRC document for mass distribution. Also, the office is sponsoring music CDs and video dramas to sensitize illiterate populations to the contents of the report. Sannoh said that his office has also helped to create local human rights councils in every district in Sierra Leone, to ensure that human rights concerns are addressed at all levels.

¶3. The OHCHR recently expanded the mission mandate to include strengthening rule of law. DFID is funding a major project on the same topic through the Justice Sector Development Program. The UNIOSIL Human Rights Section plans to complement the current DFID agenda and focus on any gaps not filled by DFID activities. Sannoh said that programs would most likely focus on capacity building in the prosecutorial system. (Comment: The human rights mandate was only recently expanded to include rule of law, so program activities have not been finalized. Nevertheless, rule of law is an important issue in Sierra Leone and assistance to the prosecutorial system will probably be well received. End Comment.)

TRC Implementation: Lacks Political Will

¶4. Sannoh said that the greatest impediment to TRC implementation (as required by law) has been lack of political will and strategic organization. He has had the most difficulty getting the government to support reparations for war victims. He said that the government lacks resources and is waiting for international assistance; however, assistance will only come after the government has made a good faith effort to assist its citizens. On a positive note, UNIOSIL recently collaborated with NaCSA (Sierra Leone's successor to the National Commission for Resettlement, Reconstruction & Rehabilitation), to host a seminar discussing institutional arrangements for a reparations program.

¶5. Sannoh also explained that because the government never created an official strategy for TRC implementation, many of the TRC recommendations have been implemented without credit. (Note: Creation of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Child Rights Bill, and judicial code of conduct are examples of TRC recommendations that have been implemented without being acknowledged as such. End Note.) Sannoh said that this lack of strategic focus makes it appear as if the GoSL is not doing anything to support implementation when, in reality, they are making some progress.

¶6. The Human Rights Section is also encumbered with a dual mandate, which requires that it report both to DPKO and OHCHR. However, because the office is not strictly under the auspices of OHCHR it does not have full access to the resources OHCHR has to offer. Sannoh argues that this lack

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of resources is another factor that makes it more difficult to support TRC implementation.

Civil Society More Visible on TRC

¶7. The most publicized efforts to draw attention to the TRC, however, have been through the NGO community. NGO's WITNESS and Conflict Management & Development Associates (CMDA) have a joint TRC follow-up project, which included a media campaign that coincided with the release of "Witness to Truth," a documentary film about the TRC. The media campaign was followed by a WITNESS-sponsored TRC workshop at Parliament, an effort to encourage MPs to implement legislative reforms recommended in the TRC Final Report.

¶8. WITNESS also convinced UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador (and former Tomb Raider) Angelina Jolie to visit Sierra Leone to push for swifter government action on TRC implementation. After an ever-so-politely confrontational joint press conference between Jolie, the Attorney General, and NGO representatives, the Government released a long-awaited White Paper response to the TRC Final Report.

¶9. A New York-based NGO, the Civil Coalition for Truth & Reconciliation, started keeping a public "score card" of the Government's progress in implementing the TRC's recommendations. In December 2005, the Government scored an "E", the lowest rating, on 31 out of 47 items tracked, and the report received wide coverage in the local press.

Comment

¶10. The UNIOSIL Human Rights Section has not been able to make implementation of the TRC recommendations a priority for the GoSL. Though the dissemination and sensitization campaign has been effective (thanks to parallel efforts from

NGOs) implementation is seriously lagging.

¶11. Direct reporting to OHCHR may provide additional resources and institutional clarity, but on the ground, UNIOSIL does not appear to be maximizing its potential leverage with the government. Strategic thinking vis a vis TRC implementation is occurring in the NGO community and UNIOSIL could use its influence with the government to transfer that thinking to GoSL officials. However, the GoSL may be implementing TRC recommendations selectively because it does not agree with all of them, such as abolition of the death penalty. End Comment.

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